

## In Their Own Words: Personal Reflections



**David Clark** (Executive Vice President and Provost)

What a trip! Our week together affected me deeply, even though I wasn't feeling at my best. Details, like the food at Neely's, the recreations at the Loraine Motel, the riveting art pieces at Kelly-Ingram Park, the dynamic worship at 16th Street Baptist Church, the visit to MLK's childhood home in Sweet Auburn, the multimedia telling of the Rosa Parks story in Montgomery, the walk across the Edmund Pettis Bridge, and the slavery simulation, are forever etched in my mind. Even more significantly, the personal stories of Josephine Boyd Bradley, Pastor and Mrs. Graetz, Afriye We-Kandodis and John Perkins ripped deeply into my heart.

I always think it's profound to visit historic places that I've read about or watched on video. I certainly experienced this on our trip. Standing where brave Americans stood up for justice made me feel, in a very small way, the emotions they must have felt. I was reminded constantly that some of these men and women are rightly famous, but most are very obscure. As I sat with those emotions and thoughts, I gave the Lord space to challenge my heart one more time.

The task for the future is to turn the feelings into understanding, the understanding into resolve, and the resolve into action. So my main reflection after Sankofa 2010 is my personal sense of renewal to the commitment to reconciliation at BU, in the church, and in the world. We still have a ways to go as a people. But we can gain hope from the reality of the progress our forebears have made. We benefit from those who came before ... from those upon whose shoulders we now stand. May God use this trip to break my heart over the things that break God's heart. And may the Lord use these memories to spur us all to new levels of reconciliation.



**Rahila Hungiapuko** (Media Communications major-Sophomore)

This past Sankofa trip I had the privilege in being the student leader. I also had the benefit because I went on the trip last year as well. I truly enjoyed the last two years of my

Sankofa experience. Sankofa has changed my life and opened my eyes in new ways that gives me the strength and voice to fight against injustices in my community and especially at Bethel. Sankofa has helped me grow into a stronger more confident leader.

As a leader I was challenged with guiding others but also trying to find my understanding of what I experienced on the trip. I went through emotional ups and downs that only made me stronger. I created new life long relationships with people alike but so different from me. I was able to share my life story with those who are on the same journey with me, I never felt alone on this journey.

The leadership team that I worked with was encouraging and reliable, all coming from different walks of life. Tanden, was a great mentor in this journey and has encouraged me to speak out against injustices giving me more confidence than I had last year going on Sankofa. Amanda's enthusiasm for the trip is inspiring and moving because she had been faithful to the trip and it's outcomes on campus and in our lives. Leon, is a great resource because he has experience in ways that most of us cannot comprehend. He has helped Sankofa grow throughout the years.

Sankofa is an amazing experience because it allows one to come out of their comfort zone and experience the Civil rights movement face to face by addressing the issues of race and racism, class, white privilege, cultural differences , the creation of whiteness and many other hot topic issues. Sankofa is a trip that everyone needs to experience before they graduate Bethel and attempt to head out into the real world. Trips like this are crucial for Reconcilers and Light and salt of the world, in order to work with people different from them and understand how to address certain issues. Sankofa is not just a trip but an experience that will last a lifetime!



**Justin Irving** (Associate Academic Dean & Associate Professor of Ministry Leadership)

### **A Journey of Learning**

My travel with the Sankofa team this year has been significant for me both personally and professionally. Although many of the historical events surrounding the civil rights movement were one's I had been exposed to from afar, prior to this I had not traveled to any of important civil rights sites or museums in the south. There is something deeply meaningful about space and location in learning about the history of a people and nation. As I consider this aspect of location and history in the civil rights movement, my mind races to the Lorraine Hotel and the balcony King was shot upon in Memphis, to King's childhood home in Atlanta, to 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church and the events that took place across the street in Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, AL, to the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma where courageous soldiers for civil

rights marched in the face of great abuses of power, and to the many other places we visited and where we reflected on important stories that must not be forgotten.

In addition to space and location, I also was deeply impacted by the people and stories we encountered. Although I've heard Rosa Parks story countless times, I still am deeply moved and challenged by her quiet courage. This was reinforced for me again as I sat on a bus next to a statue of her in Memphis, and could hardly pry myself away from studying her face and the courageous character in this face that lead her to take her stand by sitting in such quiet determination. In many ways, it is this example of quiet courage in the flow of everyday life that makes me want to find new ways to make my own stands for justice and equality in the context of my family, community, church, and here at Bethel.

In addition to being impacted by Rosa Parks' story yet again, it was a special privilege to meet individuals who shared their living history as well. First, we had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Josephine Boyd Bradley, a professor at Clark Atlanta University who was one of the first African American high school students integrated into her graduating high school. I was deeply moved by her story, and was reminded of all the unsung heroes of the civil rights movements, many who were children and youth courageously facing the realities of racism as schools were slowly integrated following Brown vs. Board of Education. To meet Dr. Bradley was a powerful experience.

Similar encounters with Robert and Jeannie Graetz in Montgomery, AL and John Perkins in Jackson, MS provided living perspectives from those immediately touched by the civil rights movement and how in their own ways they stood for justice in the face of great opposition, violence, and oppression. Taking this courage even further, the power of forgiveness and reconciliation modeled in John Perkins' life was astounding to me—what a testimony to the power of God's love which Perkins points to in helping him forgive such grievous wrongs against him, his family, and his community.

I could go on, but these locations and people have left an imprint on me that I've brought back to life among my family, community, church, and here at Bethel. While I still have so much to learn, if nothing else it has heightened my awareness of the Black experience historically and into today. I find that I'm seeing realities that were not clear to me in the past—realities such as (a) what it must be like to go through much of one's educational journey with teachers and those in positions of authority not being representative of minority cultures, (b) what it is like to see history and texts written so often from the vantage-point of only the majority culture, (c) what it must be like having to relate to agents of the government (agents such as police officers or judges) who often are not aware of cultural difference and do not appreciate uniqueness in minority cultures (these areas of ignorance often leading to abuses of power and inordinate incarceration rates), and (d) what it must be like to have to press forward in the face of such grievous violations of justice in diverse cultural communities.

While I'm still processing what this all means for me, I'm so grateful for having experienced and been challenged by these stories and realities. I'm in a journey of learning and understanding, and see this as a vital phase I will continue to engage as I consider the needs of the communities in which I'm engaged.



**Stephen Johansson** (Major in Political Science and Social Studies Education- Senior)

The Sankofa journey really opened my eyes to a lot of issues. When it comes to issues of race, as a white male, I can choose when to address these issues and when not to. I can choose to go on a trip like Sankofa, feel good about myself, and then go back to my everyday life. This is not the case for my brothers and sisters of color. Sankofa awoke me to my power and my privilege. It awoke me to the responsibility to consciously choose to address issues of racial inequality and discrimination on a daily basis. In the classroom I student teach in, I must address these issues. In the job I hope to have someday, I must address these issues. In my home, my church, my life I must address issues of racial inequality. And, I must do more than wrestle with these issues; I must do something about them. I must be willing to let go of my power in order to hear other voices. I must be willing to acknowledge that maybe my voice, as a white man, is heard a little too often in society. Sankofa has made me a new person, a person who is not going to go through life living in a place of comfort and ignorance. Why? My faith and my humanity call me to something higher, reconciliation.



**David Kim** (Business/ Reconciliation Studies/ History major- Freshman)

### **The Call to Fight**

If we neglect to engage in this dialogue and embrace diversity and fight for justice, our complacency will perpetuate the cycle of oppression. Desmond Tutu, who fought against apartheid in South Africa, puts it this way: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

Contrary to popular belief, racial oppression did not end with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. No, racism has not even been weakened; rather, it has transformed, gone covert. Charles Quist-Adade, professor at Central Michigan University sees the subtle danger in this. "The fact that racism has changed its appearance and form does not make it any better. Indeed, racism in its new garbs is even more insidious and treacherous," he writes. A major element of this new racism, systemic racism, has prevailed through years of civil rights activism; it is a threat even to

Christian institutions, specifically if these institutions are built upon the ideologies and theologies of racist founders.

On Bethel's campus, I have been told in person that "black people are lazy." I have been told, even as a known Japanese-American, that "the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were necessary, because otherwise all of America would have died." I have argued with a Residence Life student employee over the validity of the reconciliation movement and the calling for all Christians to fight injustice. In every conversation, I hear a denial of the injustice present in the United States. I hear about how "we've come a long way," which in actuality is a reduction of the major work still left to be done. I hear subtle supremacy and a resistance to accepting the unjust reality of privilege.

This cannot continue. Christian institutions must be beacons of light on these issues; Bethel must become a place for change, a place where justice is sought after. It must become a place filled with the Sankofa spirit. We must confront the complacency and apathy that pervades our campus and stand for the Truth of Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God."

Scripture calls us to this fight. Micah 6:8 powerfully declares, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." In Matthew 25, we see the calling Jesus presents to us: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Activist Ewuare Osayande believes "We are living in history. Either history will make us, or we will make history." We need Sankofa to liberate us from the cultural captivity that threatens the integrity of the very Gospel we preach. We need Sankofa to expose the original sin that serves as the platform for modern-day oppression in America. And we need to embrace Sankofa as a primary component of our mission as Christ-followers. To fight injustice is our Scriptural calling; Jesus came to liberate the oppressed, and we cannot follow him without joining His cause.

Christian institutions need Sankofa to be Christian.



**Jenny Lee** (Nursing major- Junior)

**How has Sankofa personally effected me?**

I have been a prisoner to the unknown reality of internalized racism. What I mean by this is how I have been socialized and marginalized to forget my identity specifically my Hmong

culture which caused me to assimilate to the majority culture. Sankofa, has shown and taught me the remarkable knowledge of cultural identity and why I did exactly what I did, to hate myself and my people. This evilness has been going on inside of me since I could remember which “I would never be as good as any white person.” The manifestation of the evilness grew larger and larger which blinded me to find Christ, even during my baptism when I so called “gave myself to Christ.” The trip has definitely helped with the recovery of my hurt and pain and made certain to help me move past the place I was before onto a new beginning.

Sankofa, bridged a new meaning to relationship. It certainly has its educational piece however I look at my own revelation to my identity and it says something so much more. My two year experiences of going on Sankofa has been an amazing journey. I went and came back a completely changed person (literally). My first year going on the trip I thought it was going to be a breeze, learning about American History because as students we are all taught the curriculum; therefore coming onto the trip I had no real expectation. However from both trips God continued to use me to see more than the injustices of race but how he used the people he did like Martin Luther King, Jr., to men, women, and children to make the movement successful as a body of Christ. Through it all apart from Sankofa’s in depth discovery of our American History from the late era of slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, to present day, it reveals untold and forgotten stories of the heroes and heroes fighting for the freedom we live in today. This Sankofa journey is a humbling experience that will break you to find yourself with encouragement and challenges as you walk with Christ.

#### **What did I learn on my first time going on the trip?**

I dealt with my inner demons and recognized my faults as a child of God which was through my pride and arrogance I held inside. I saw the life I was living and understood why I felt the way I did with my internalized racism. I learned much of what the history entailed and how the movement has benefitted me and all my brother and sisters. I came to see the bigger picture that it was not a “black and white” issue, because what did other people of color achieve from it, their own freedom. After the trip I had my own interest in discovering more of what the history was and beginning to speak of my experience with my family and friends.

#### **What did I learn on my second time going on the trip?**

I witness the Lord and his love he has overflowing for his children. I understood what the realities of The Civil Rights Movement and I praise God that he gave me the eyes and heart to see the bigger picture of the spiritual battle we as humans forget to see from our history and our everyday difficulties. I certainly achieved a goal I had never thought I would and that was the seeing God’s peace. I am still amazed at how much the Lord has revealed to me and I am waiting patiently for his guidance and what other plans he has set aside. I came to see the true identity of what God has created through our culture and that has without a doubt made an impact on my journey I’ve embarked in my college years.

#### **How am I facing my challenges and living out my experiences?**

My experiences are carried with me each day. You must be wondering how, and as for me one who subconsciously thinks about my ethnicity and identity every second it never is turned off. Why, because this is a journey I recognized that the Lord has planned for me and through my optimism and humbleness to grow and mature; I am more than willing to undertake the future challenges I have my way and Bethel is only the starting point.



**Meagan LeFebvre** (Social Work major, minor in Religious Studies- Junior)

Before going on Sankofa I thought I knew a lot about the civil rights movement and the impact it has made on our society. I also thought I knew a lot about racism and reconciliation. But a trip like Sankofa not only brought to life history, but also connected our past to our present day reality in ways that I didn't know before.

We went to the MLK museum, the National Voting Rights Museum, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and many more. As I walked through these museums I noticed the strength of the African American people, as they were being brutally beaten and oppressed. The civil rights movement was a powerful organized movement and MLK did not and could not do it alone. He needed followers who believed in his vision and who could execute his vision. I also realized that there were white people, who were also a part of the civil rights movement. Seeing some white people being allies encouraged me to think about my place not only as part of the group, who are oppressive, but also part of a group that could be allies. I learned that the civil rights movement and black history month is not just African American history, but it's our American history. It's history that I haven't been taught in school because we live in a white dominated society. Not only did I learn from the museums, but I also learned from speakers, discussions with peers, and our large group discussions.

I learned of the present day racism and how much of the past is connected to our present day reality. So often I'm blinded to racism because, as a white person, I can choose whether or not to see it. Sankofa was a trip where I could build relationships with students of color and other white students who saw the importance of learning about the bigger picture of our American history. It was also a trip to see each other's humanity and how our life experiences are different, but yet so connected at the same time. I saw the importance of seeing the color of one's skin and learning about their past and how that affects their present day reality. With all this said it leads me back to Bethel.

The history museums, the students, the staff, and speakers helped me realize the importance of hearing the voices that aren't often heard in our society. I also realized my privilege as a white person and also my responsibility to see racism and to act for justice and reconciliation. So often when I learn of things I'm often left with a question of now what? Or how can I practically apply what I learned? After coming back from Sankofa I realized the need at Bethel for students and staff to know about not only the history of African Americans, but to see and be aware of racism and how that affects students of color at our school today. The civil rights movement was about a vision and a community of followers executing that vision for justice and reconciliation. Knowing the issues around race, diversity, and reconciliation at our

school I realized that we need a vision and a group of followers to carry out that vision. Jenny Lee and I felt a need to organize students to talk about student leadership and what a student leader should know especially being at a place like Bethel. This is our vision: “WE” need to be leaders to lead all people. As leaders we need to be able hear the unheard voices. We also need to be able to recognize and accept differences, esp. our since our core value is to be Reconcilers and Ambassadors of Christ. The majority of our school is white but the white perspective is not the only perspective out there. The world outside of Bethel is completely different than this Nordic American Community. In order to be good leaders we not only need to be good leaders here at Bethel, but also in the world. Trips like Sankofa make me see my responsibility, as a white person, to speak up and be an ally to students of color. It also encouraged me that change can happen with a community united with a vision for justice and reconciliation.



**Leon Rodrigues** (Chief Diversity Officer & Special Assistant to the President)

Seeking justice is hard work and sometimes we get distracted from the actual important work that needs to happen. It is good to see people reflect on their journey. It helps them to be conscientious and avoid reducing Sankofa to a horror movie or an armchair position. I have been on Sankofa several times and each time I realize how much we still need to do to address the hatred and institutional discrimination that was characteristic of how people of African descent were treated in this country. Continuing right up to the late 1960s, today we still deal with the scars and pathologies of slavery and exclusion. As you know, inclusion and reconciliation is a very slow process and sometimes we can get disillusioned. Sankofa is an experience that makes me very excited especially when I see students, staff and faculty working very hard to build relationships, deepen their understanding and commit to ending exclusion. I live for the day when we will perceive each other as created in God's image and acknowledge the sacrificial work of our Savior that restored our dignity and human value. Sankofa has helped me firm up my commitment to making sacrifices and see those who have been historically disregarded as fully part of our community and human family. That I believe is the heart of God.

Once again, on this Sankofa trip, I have been able to walk alongside colleagues and students who want to be authentic and struggle through the mess created by White supremacy. Sankofa has helped me reflect on my faith in God and to become better at love, honesty, diligence, prayer and forgiveness. I must strive to build resilience and resistance through confession and overcome the temptation of pride or personal gain. I must call out and oppose injustice when I see it. God is not honored when his people are insincere and use social privilege and other benefits to take the place of compassion and sacrifice. I look forward to the



next Sankofa trip and watching God work in the hearts of Sankofa pilgrims. I also welcome the way God has changed many who were part of building this legacy at Bethel.



**Mallory Staloch** (Nursing major- Senior)

After much prayerful consideration and persuasion from friends who had gone before me, I decided that the Sankofa journey was something that I needed to do. Yet, as with anything that God calls me to do, I was fearful. I barely knew anyone on the team, and opening up, being vulnerable, and sharing my thoughts was scary – I was afraid of being judged or offending someone. I also knew that this would be a life-changing experience and I was fearful about the things that would change in my life or to learn of the things that I needed to change in my life. I knew that despite my fear, participating in Sankofa was the right decision and I am so thankful that God lead me to that experience. After returning to Bethel, I found that it was very difficult to put my experience to words, but I want to share a journal entry that I wrote on March 21, 2010, the day after returning...

After going on the Sankofa journey, I have a better idea of what reconciliation means. I think that I had always thought of it as something that “Reconciliation Majors” do. But to me, reconciliation now means simply loving people – loving humanity – without regard to race, age, gender, ability, or any other difference. It is something that *everyone is* called to do by God. On the Sankofa journey, we looked back on the events during slavery and the Civil Rights Movement so that we could understand what happened and also so that we can move forward. After seeing what so many people went through in the name of social justice and reconciliation, I now feel that I have a better idea of what it looks like to fight for these issues. Reconciliation is not a solution to a problem – it is a process, a way of life. I learned that I need to tear down those walls fear and comfort that are holding me back (not just step out from behind them, only to go back). I need to step out and work for reconciliation and justice, no matter the risks that I face. Those who came before us took so many risks, and when asked if they would do it over again, they said that they would.

While on this trip, one of the questions that haunted me was “what would I have done, as a white, middle-class woman, if I had lived back then?” and I was faced with the terrible reality that I probably would not have done anything. So therefore, what specifically in my life do I need to change, so that I am fighting for reconciliation? This is a question that I am still working on the answer to, and probably will be for the rest of my life, but it will also be a driving force for continued work on social justice and reconciliation. I know that I will be taking huge risks by standing up for these issues, and I cannot do this on my own. Just as those who fought for justice in the past worked as a team, I now am part of a team of people who are committed to the same issues as I am and we can work together. I am so blessed to be a part of

this team and I have learned so much from each and every one of the members. But I also have Jesus Christ at my side – my source of strength and a perfect example to follow. My Sankofa journey hasn't ended here... it begins *now*!